



Article published Feb 16, 2007

## Don't delay

### THE ISSUE

**The Alabama Senate Democratic Caucus is urging Gov. Bob Riley to call off a special session to consider a constitutional amendment to raise the state's bonding capacity for industrial incentives.**

In a bizarre turn of events Thursday, the Alabama Senate Democratic Caucus asked Gov. Bob Riley to scrap plans for a special session later this month. Riley, a Republican, is expected to ask the Legislature to increase the state's bonding capacity to help lure several large industries that would employ 5,000 people.

The caucus's logic seems off kilter given the urgency of what the governor proposes.

Time is important for two reasons. First, the companies considering Alabama for new manufacturing plants are expected to make location decisions in six to eight weeks. One of those companies could employ 1,500 people in the Shoals. The companies -- and the governor -- need to know if Alabama is in the running to offer the incentives other states are offering to lure them.

Second, Riley is proposing a constitutional amendment to expand bonding authority to \$400 million. If the Legislature signs off on the amendment, it must then be approved by the voters before it takes effect. State law requires amendment votes to be scheduled no sooner than 90 days after the Legislature adopts the bill. That means the earliest a vote could be scheduled is early June.

The governor is considering calling a special session later this month.

The Senate Democratic Caucus wants Riley to call the special session in the midst of the regular session, which begins March 6.

Riley has good reason to be suspicious of the mechanics of that scenario for two reasons. In 2004, he asked the Legislature to go into special session during its regular session to consider ethics reforms. The Legislature refused. Second, the Senate will be at war with itself this spring because of intense partisan power sharing disagreements. Minority Republicans say they plan filibusters and stalling tactics throughout the session.

Senate Democrats said in a letter to the governor that calling the special session after the Legislature convenes would save taxpayers money. Yes, it would. But with the time-sensitive nature of the companies' decision-making processes and the promised delaying tactics by Senate Republicans, spending the extra money for a special session is a more prudent course of action.

We urge the governor to meet with Democratic leaders and stick to his original plan. The potential to gain 5,000 new jobs will more than compensate the cost of a special session.